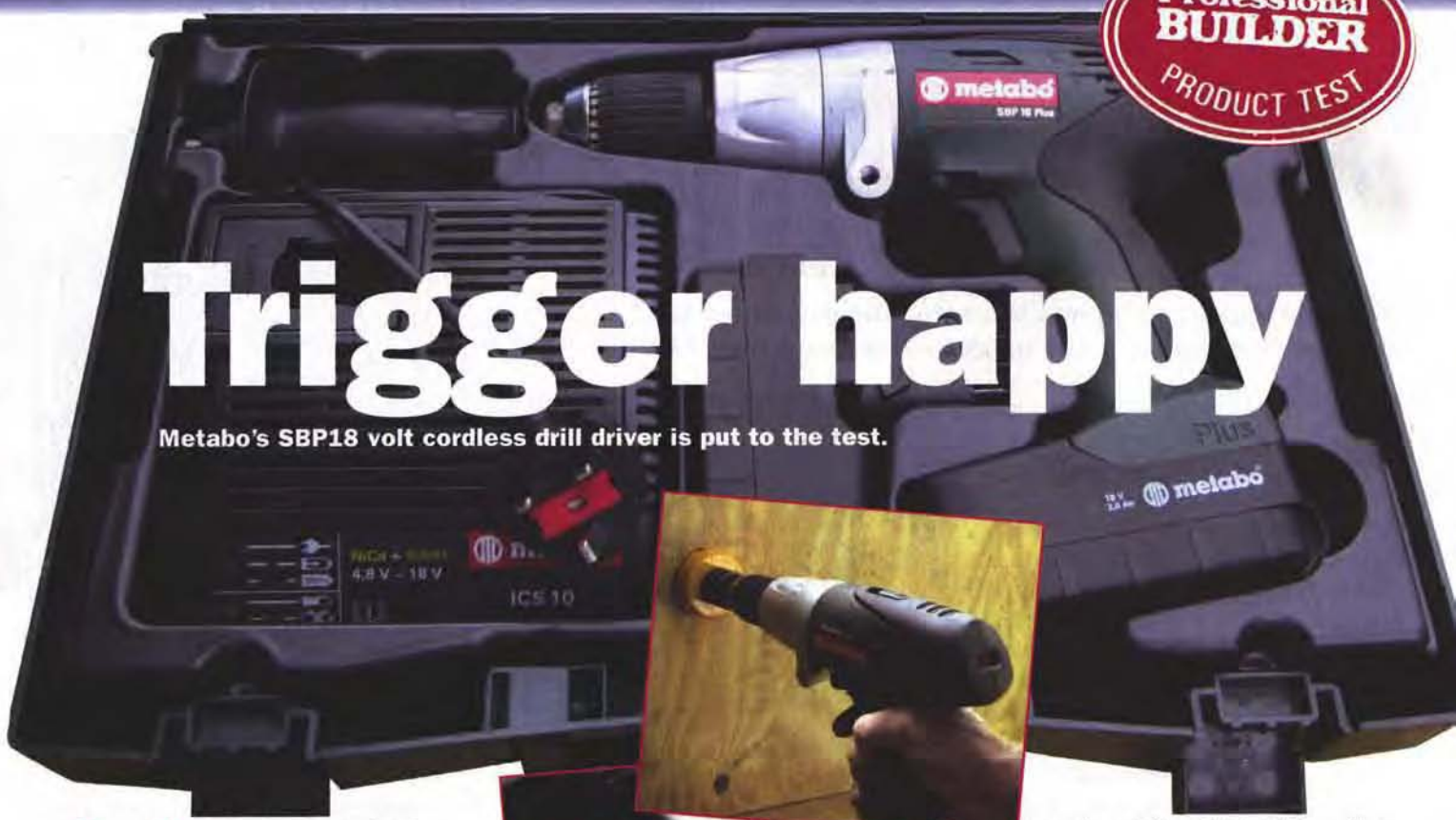
Professional BUILDER PRODUCT TEST

Trigger happy

Metabo's SBP18 volt cordless drill driver is put to the test.



Metabo tests against a range of 600 watt mains powered drills (voltage unspecified) show that the SBP18 volt cordless drill driver will drive deeper, faster and larger than the mains drills. The claim is very impressive and will no doubt be scrutinized by competitors, but the idea that cordless tools are gutless is now well and truly buried.

Whenever I test a new drill I always exceed the capacities and spend a lot of time gunning the trigger to see if I can wreck it. If I don't smell shellac burning on the windings or see smoke rising up then this is a good start. I mention this little test for a good reason, because it's the very thing that lots of tradesmen do when they are trying to remove a rusty or mashed up screw. It works well in moving stubborn screws because the torque is more powerful at the start and obviously better in 1st gear, but it can knock the life out of the motor and trigger. Metabo has therefore replicated this action electronically rather than mechanically, by including an impulse switch in the back end of the motor. This saves the user from gunning the start trigger and also evens out the pulsing to make sure the action is smoother and therefore less likely to jump the bit out of the screw head. I have tested this extensively and it doesn't seem to overheat the motor. A major part of the success of Metabo tools has been in building motors that can withstand heat but also fan it away faster.

The robust alloy gearbox casing is also a good feature on this drill and one that a lot of manufacturers have picked up on. It not only resists deforming when delivering high torque, but it gets rid of heat faster at the front end.

On the down side, the weight of an 18 volt is a problem if you are using a drill driver all day and for this reason alone I'd still prefer the 15.6V machine as an all-rounder. Having said that, if drilling capacity is your prime concern then the 50mm in wood capability of this 18V machine does give you the ability to use hole saws and auger bits for running waste pipes through floorboards and kitchen units. You can also drill up to 16mm through brick, so you can get 15mm heating pipes through bricks, tiles and blocks.

There is a side handle which goes on the left or right of the gearbox housing and is fixed to counter the high torque but because it doesn't rotate around the body, you won't be able to pack the tool back in the box with the handle still attached.

The 16 minute (on 2 amp hour) ICS 10 charger is an advanced bit of electronics that gives the battery the best chance of a long and happy life. Metabo claims that an average user can get 10 years out of a battery. I liked the cable tidy around the back but would have liked to see a dummy slot for the plug so it stows away neatly. There is room in the casing at the back for this but I can see that it can't be done commercially because UK plugs are unique and it isn't worth making a UK version. We will just have to wait until the rest of the world catches us up.

More information

For further information on Metabo products circle readerlink 270

Metabo SBP18 Plus

£468.83 ☎ 02380 732000

www.metabo.co.uk Typical street price: £328

With only five torque settings, the Metabo SBP18 Plus drill may not seem a good choice compared with the rest. But to be honest, I seldom use the torque settings when screwdriving unless it's a uniform material such as ply or MDF where drive depth is consistent. I tend to rely on the slower variable speed on timber, so I can control driving in soft or hard areas equally.

The alloy front end of the drill is tapped to take the auxiliary handle. This can only be positioned to the left or right, angled down by a few degrees for comfort.
The motor casing is equal longest with Ryobi, although 290mm still isn't excessive. This can feel slightly front-heavy when horizontal drilling, though. My hands are not big, so I found the grip a bit cumbersome. It's rubberised on the back and over the rear of the casing for comfort.

Forward/reverse is via a rocker above the trigger, which takes a little getting used to, but works well.

Good timber drilling capacities give the Metabo an advantage. It has a 50mm maximum along with 13mm in steel and 16mm in masonry. Two further features make the Metabo stand out from the crowd. Like other drills in their range, this has 'Impuls' action. This pulses the chuck, acting as an impact driver for easy screw insertion and removal without the wrist-snapping torque as the screw bites.

Diagnostic chargers keep a battery 'as new' throughout its life, but fast chargers such as Metabo's ICS10 (provided as standard) not only keep the battery at optimum performance, but also extend the amount of charges the battery will accept. The 2.0Ah batteries can be fully charged in 16 minutes.

Made in Germany, typical price is £328.

Impuls action is activated with a small switch at the rear of the drill

GW verdict

- ⊕ Fast charger. Impuls action
- ⊖ Bulky handle

Value for money ●●●●○
Performance ●●●●○

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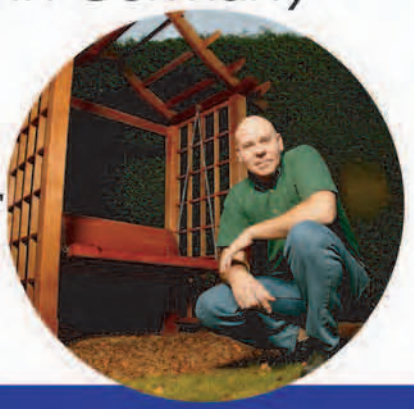
David Free uses ELEKTRA BECKUM on Discovery Home and Leisure's -the "Great British Woodworking Show"



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